/62 cont./

4. Life Cycle

842 862 [63] [65] a) Birth control

The number of children among both the Surára and the Pakidái is very small; no woman has more than three at most. Aside from the high infant mortality rate as a result of the lack of hygiene, however, this is bound up with the fact that the women must observe an interval of at least three years after each birth, as long as a child is fed with mother's milk, which, in the opinion of these Indians, prevents conception to a considerable 842 847 extent. If a woman nevertheless becomes pregnant, the medicine men know how to prepare an abortive medicine from plant juices. The reason for birth control, I was told, is that if a child were born during the period of restriction, it would not be healthy and able to cope with life, because the mother's body would still be too weak.

843 b) Food taboos during pregnancy

Before the birth the mother must observe many food taboos in order not to harm her child. Her diet then consists primarily of the tender meat of the mutum (Crax sp.), cooked bananas, manioc flat-cakes, and a drink that is made from the nourishing, very oily pupunha fruits. If she were to eat wild-pig meat, for example, the child would be born dead; the meat of the pirarucu (Osteoglossidae, the largest fresh-water fish), which carries inside it the bad breath of the river, would make it blind, and parrot meat would make it cry constantly later on.

844 c) Birth

While giving birth, the woman kneels in front of a tree and embraces the trunk with both arms. The ground has been sprinkled with water beforehand so that it is slimy and soft. Several female members of the tribe assist the woman in labor. After the birth, two women, each with a cotton thread, tie off the umbilical cord, and a third one then bites it off. The father

Surara
Pakidai

/62 cont./ The father
844 of the child later hangs it on the tip of a pupunha palm
[824] (Guilielma speciosa Mart.), which is connected with fertility
[842] magic; he buries the afterbirth in the planting. Two confine-
ments which I was able to observe were very easy and quick.
[142] On the lower part of the children's back I could see in each case
the grayish-black spots of pigment, the so-called Mongolian spots.

844 Immediately after birth, the mother with her baby took a
846 bath at the nearby riverbank and then lay down in her hammock
for one or two hours. After that, with the baby on her arm, she
already went back to her customary occupation.

845 If a complication arises during confinement, the chief, who
[622] is at the same time the witch doctor, is fetched.
[756] In contrast to most other Indian tribes, twins are reared.
845 If there should be triplets, which so far has never occurred, one
847 child would have to be killed, for, as they said, the mother has
only two breasts. Deformed children are killed and thrown into
the river.

852 There are no birth ceremonies, for up to its third year of
851 life the child belongs to the flesh and blood of its mother and
553 is not given a name before this.

854 d) Infancy and early childhood

The infant or young child is not left alone for a moment. When the mother attends to her housework or gathers fruits and berries in the forest, she carries it in a carrying band of tree bast on her left hip, so that she has the right hand free for her work.
853 Even at night it sleeps with her in the hammock. The breast is constantly at its disposal, so that it never /63/ thinks of sucking its finger. This may perhaps also explain why these Indians have such a perfect set of teeth. As soon as the teeth start coming in, the child is given tough meat to chew on, in order to facilitate teething. At the same time the long period of nursing, along with abundant sunshine, prevents rickets. After 3-4 months the baby is given supplementary food in the form of cooked, green mealy bananas (Musa paradisiaca normalis), which are prechewed by the mother, or a porridge made out of manioc flat-cakes.

/69 cont./

727 are lodged in every village. They are regarded as common prop-
83 erty. Unfortunately, one also sees children used for similar pur-
171 poses. This clearly shows the dualism in the etiquette of the savages, whose moral laws apply only to members of their own tribe. This attitude, which is common to all primitive peoples, cannot, for this reason, alter our judgment concerning the morality of the Karaja in general" (332).

332. Ehrenreich, 1891, p. 28.

844 k) Death and burial customs
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764 As the previous comments have shown, there are neither birth nor marriage ceremonies among the Surára and Pakidái. The social and religious life is therefore dominated all the more by death practices.

764 If a human being who has completed the third year of life dies, the relatives are inconsolable. There is lamenting in the loudest tones, and the flood of tears among men, women, and children seems endless. Meanwhile, however, the customary occupations are not neglected. While the woman is fetching water from the river, for example, she weeps incessantly to herself and intermittently shrieks loudly; the same is true for the men at their work in the plantings and even for the children at their play. The other members of the tribe cast only an occasional compassionate glance at the mourners, and with this their interest is exhausted.

Immediately after a death it is the duty of the male relatives and /70/ friends to fell small trees in the forest, out of which they make a cylindrical wooden frame -- praotimá. This consists of 15 to 20 poles 1.60-1.80 meters long, which are tied with lianas a handbreadth apart. The corpse is slid into this, and liana ropes are drawn over the two open ends so that it is protected from the attack of birds, especially vultures.

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

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846 the male as continuing in importance not only after conception—at which stage, in our own positivist scientific view, the male role ceases to count—but for a certain period after the actual birth. The male, the cause, is still in the picture, according to the Indian mind, when the mother and child are living a normal life.

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[115] I had known other native peoples, and in regard to these Indian beliefs on the subject of childbirth, Luis Antonio confirmed what had already come to my knowledge.

[825] 'In order for the birth to be a success,' he told me, 'when the wife is five months gone, the husband should stop eating peccary, snake or *caribe* (the name given in Venezuela to the carnivorous fish known in Brazil as *piranha*), and the flesh of any animal of an aggressive nature.' (Here, principles of hygiene were mingled with elements of magic, as happens also in the more advanced religions.) 'Then, before the birth, during the birth and after, the man must

[846] stay in the hammock without stirring, because any strain on his part, or any mishap that came his way, would affect the child and might have dire results.'

[562] The explanation sounds quite normal and natural once one admits the principle of continued causation in the man, the woman being regarded simply as a means. In fact there is no need for her to obey the injunction to stay in the hammock. She will continue her daily round until she feels 'something break inside her'. Then, with the midwife, she will hurry to the appointed place on the river-bank.

*123
844 I once had the chance of being present at a birth. I was with the Taurepan Indians of the Gran Sabana, and I watched hidden behind a cluster of Mauritius palm, where I could follow the principal stages of the proceedings. The woman, with her head tilted back, was seated on the clay bank in a sort of arm-chair shaped hollow which had been scooped out—whether naturally or made for the purpose I do not know. The midwife knelt at her feet, waiting. For some time both remained in this position. The woman kept giving little cries—but not really cries of pain. After a brief labour, the mother uttered one long howl which sounded to me like an 'u . . . u . . . uh' of rapture, and the midwife rose to her feet, holding up a tiny, mottled infant head downwards by the heels.

Still holding the baby by the feet, the old lady washed him in the river—
—with exactly the motions you might expect from a washerwoman giving the final rinsing to some heavy garment. I couldn't see the next step, but a few

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

minutes later the two women were quietly walking home with the baby, who appeared to be dead.

While the mother goes about her normal tasks, with the child tied on her back all the time, the father stays in the hammock, absolutely motionless, eating nothing but fruit and palm-hearts—'they don't heat the blood,' Luis Antonio assured us.

Among the Guiana-Amazon Indians I have never heard of the father himself suffering from birth-pangs during this period of rest. Such reports, however, have come from travellers and observers of the Indian tribes inhabiting the southern regions of the lower Amazon. Before one can believe them one must accept a little more than the theory of the inter-relation of cause and effect. A good dose of barefaced auto-suggestion would also be needed to account for this phenomenon, and only the most undeveloped of the Indians would be capable of it.

IV

Of kindred interest, while we are on the subject of childbirth, is the organization of Indian society. It has been asked whether the pattern is patriarchal or matriarchal, and what part is played by the individual family.

If the question is limited to the Shirians, the answer is simple: they have reached no stage of organization above the rudimentary animal level. The family has the sole function of producing life and protecting it until the offspring is capable of fending for itself. Their society is not patriarchal, because the role of the family ceases where its physical functions cease, at the point where, in civilized societies, moral functions begin. Nor is the pattern matriarchal, because the women are held in a form of slavery, though the very lack of an exact social system means that they sometimes emerge from this to become the companions of the men—a state of affairs which may be regarded as more emancipated, or less.

The children of both sexes, while they are young, remain the exclusive responsibility of the women, but when the boys reach an age at which they can do without their mothers (this generally means as soon as they cease to be breast-fed) they become independent males and do not belong to anybody in particular. Up to a certain point the father is free to pick out one who may be

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844 [123] James Barker (author of the essay) and I (Killam) were invited to witness the birth of a child. Our house was about 200 meters away from the Guaika settlement. We were able to hear the moans of the woman in confinement. When we arrived at the settlement, the father-in-law of the Indian woman was performing a stimulating dance in front of the dwelling which he shared with his son and his daughter-in-law.

At a short distance behind the house, in a clearing made in the woods and away from the path, there were several women, including the woman in confinement. We were taken along a path near to the place where the women were. There were several other persons observing the event along with us: a couple [123] of men and some children. They seemed to be only slightly interested, the children trying to make us go away from there in order to play with them.

The woman in confinement was walking incessantly from one side to the other, complaining about her pains, until she finally settled down on the ground among some weeds. We waited for some 15 minutes. Then, after having heard the cry of the infant, one of the women assisting called us. The child, a little girl, had just been born. The mother received us with a smile. She had squatted down, holding the baby upright in her lap. Two of the women proceeded to cut the umbilical cord, using a piece of cane, and then they stuffed it with some green leaves.

The mother gathered up the afterbirth with her hands, wrapping it in green leaves which a girl brought her. Another person later took it away. Then the mother rubbed mud and [825] humus over the place where the afterbirth had been. They said that this is done for protection against wild animals.

Meanwhile, someone brought water in a gourd. The mother took a mouthful, which she then squirted gently over her little creature, bathing it with the water warmed in her mouth.

After the little girl had been bathed, they placed her on green, clean leaves, covering her with a few branches. Several of the women walked back and forth above her several /489/ times.

844 123 /489 cont./ They also invited us to do this, but, not knowing the meaning of the practice, we declined to do so.

846 After this, the mother took the little creature and went off to her house. There she rested for two or three days before resuming her work in the "conuco."

844 Later, another child was born at night. We were not there, but we were informed that it had been born in the house, to which green leaves were brought for the birth.

Puberty

881 To reach puberty is an important event, especially for the girls. It is considered that the girl has reached puberty at her first menstruation. Her mother, older sister, or another woman who might be her guardian gathers leaves and builds a wall around her hammock to isolate her from everything. For approximately one week, the girl never leaves this area. Her mother brings her food, water, firewood, and any other things which might be needed.

At the end of this retirement, the girl comes out, adorned with flowers, leaves, cotton belts, strings of beads, and feathers.

Maturity

885 622 A man is considered mature when he has marriageable children. The head of a settlement is frequently a grandfather, but sometimes the settlement may be governed by a somewhat younger man.

Old Age

888 Retirement from active life is somewhat gradual, depending upon the strength of the individual.

Old persons are respected, but they are no longer leaders in the affairs of the settlement. They are cared for even when they are no longer capable of contributing to their own support. /Plates I-V follow./